2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

[p.40]

CHAPTER IV

The Basis of Leadership

621 The Maltese word for leader, *mexxej*, is seldom heard, and then
[192] only in reference to the leader of a political party. I once asked a
[622] parish priest who were the leaders of the village. He laughed and
[551] replied that there weren't any, because his parishioners did not like leaders. With the exception of the professionals and *il-puliti* from the towns, all the inhabitants of a village usually call one another by their Christian names and in general look upon each other as equals. This egalitarian outlook is compounded of many factors, of which the most important are similar occupation, standard of living and values, the detailed knowledge of each other's personal lives that comes with residence in a face-to-face community, and
178 jealousy. Any person who attempts to lead or to try to start
578 something new – such as a village playground – is derided. His
621 true motive is seen as self aggrandizement and his enemies and envious neighbours are quick to point this out to others who may
[539] not have realized it. 'Envy follows the wise man like his shadow' (*L-ghira titrot wara l-gharef bhal dellu mieghu*), goes the Maltese
[609] proverb. Professionals and outsiders, especially if they are from the town, are occasionally able to start something new. Their social distance from most of the community protects them from the full impact of the envy and gossip which moulds so much of village life.

554 But in spite of the absence of official lay leaders and the con-
621 servative pressure of envy and gossip, there are a number of
793 persons who have a greater say than others in the affairs of the community. They are able to do this by virtue of their social position, their occupation or office in one of the village associations or their influence with the parish priest. These persons, together with the parish priest, form the aggregate which can be
[192] said to run the affairs of the community. While there is no generic term for this aggregate, those who compose it are sometimes referred to as *il-kbarat*, 'the big ones', or more derogatively as